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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 002024

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND INL (ANDREW BUHLER)

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SUBJECT: MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS DISCUSSES PRIORITIES,
COOPERATION

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Minister of Internal Affairs Bakhodir Matlyubov on November 22. Matlyubov cited counterterrorism and counternarcotics as key priorities, and repeatedly noted Uzbekistan's cooperation with a variety of other countries on these issues. He was also appreciative of U.S. support after the terrorist bombings in 1999 and of U.S. assistance on counternarcotics (he welcomed renewed cooperation with DEA if this were an offer). Matlyubov described recent prison reforms in the country and said the ICRC was welcome to visit prisons if it needed to. End summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Minister of Internal Affairs Bakhodir Matlyubov on November 22. Matlyubov greeted him warmly, and gave an overview of the structure and missions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). Acting Chief of the Organizational-Inspector Department of the MVD Hasan Sarabekov and Chief of the International Cooperation Department Rustam Sayfullev also participated in the meeting. Uzbekistan was stable and under control, Matlyubov said, and 80-85 percent of the 75,000 crimes committed during the year had been solved. Uzbekistan has 3,500 police stations, he continued.

¶3. (C) Matlyubov said that countering terrorism and extremism was one of the MVD's priorities. He then launched into a discussion of the history of terrorism and extremism in the region, noting that camps in the mountains of Tajikistan and Chechnya had trained fighters who then came to Uzbekistan. Matlyubov was appreciative of the assistance Uzbekistan had received from the United States, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Russia in the aftermath of a series of five simultaneous explosions in Tashkent on February 16, ¶1999. Terrorism is a general problem for every country, he said, and Uzbekistan is keeping tabs on a number of terrorists. In response to a question about Yuldashev, Matlyubov said he doubted reports that he had been killed. Matlyubov said that Uzbekistan works with various countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on preventive and operational plans, and said that Uzbekistan has received a great deal of help from the United States in the past.

¶4. (C) Uzbekistan is also worried about narcotics, Matlyubov continued. He said that in the early 1990s, heroin and cocaine were unheard of in Uzbekistan. In 1994, the MVD had

seized 97 grams of heroin. This year, the MVD alone had seized tons of heroin, he exclaimed. Matlyubov said that every year, the MVD rents helicopters to search for poppies. (Note: The MVD lacks its own rotary-wing capability, and rents helicopters from the Ministry of Defense, which it pays for fuel and flight hours. End note.) He said Afghanistan was the main source of these drugs, and while Uzbekistan was a transit country, there were narcotics users in Uzbekistan as well. Uzbekistan works with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia on counternarcotics, and has especially good contact with Kazakhstan and Russia. He noted that Uzbekistan and the United States had done good work that had yielded good results in counternarcotics in the past. Uzbekistan uses American technical equipment in its counternarcotics efforts, he said, and American specialists had trained MVD officials. He welcomed any opportunity to renew ties with DEA.

15. (C) Matlyubov said that Uzbekistan also works with various countries on trafficking-in-persons and migration issues. Turning to the subject of prisons, he said that Uzbekistan was constructing a facility that could accommodate 400 people, and death-row inmates would be transferred there to serve life terms. (Note: Uzbekistan is slated to abolish capital punishment on January 1, 2008. End note.) He said that the prison population in Uzbekistan has declined from over 80,000 inmates years ago to roughly 40,000 inmates now. He noted that there was a big difference between this number and the number of prisoners in Russia and Kazakhstan. In response to the Ambassador's query, Matlyubov said that the ICRC can access prisons if they need to, and Uzbekistan was ready to provide full access. Then he asked the Ambassador to come to him with any questions; the MVD would respond to these. After the discussion, Matlyubov showed Ambassador the

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pre-trial detention facility that was being constructed to the rear of the MVD building.

16. (C) Comment: The Minister for Internal Affairs was very friendly and had clearly prepared carefully for this meeting, reading from a type-written speech for many of his remarks--SOP for the MVD. He even mentioned Thanksgiving. Surprisingly, Matlyubov struck us as an experienced law enforcement professional (after 34 years as a cop), not a thug or an ideologue. He actually seemed to relish his script and its call for improved relations with the U.S.
NORLAND